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*Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association*

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Support/ Oppose
<b>GOVERNOR'S BILL 6842: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT.</b>	<b>Oppose Provisions Related to CEQ</b>

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For 120 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation issues.

I am here to oppose the provisions of Governor's Bill 6842 that would transfer the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to the Office of Legislative Management, eliminate its funding, and reduce its authority to require other state agencies to provide plans that may have environmental impacts.

As you know, CEQ was established in 1971 to fulfill several important functions:

- Publish an excellent Annual Report on the state of Connecticut's Environment;
- Print the Environmental Monitor to provide opportunities for public input on proposed state projects that have potential environmental impacts that require scoping under the CT Environmental Policy Act (CEPA);
- Hold monthly public hearings to report progress and enable public input on various environmental concerns;
- Make recommendations to the General Assembly on legislation that may be required to improve Connecticut's environment; and
- Serve as Connecticut's premier environmental watchdog agency.

CEQ is currently an independent agency that operates with support from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for administrative purposes only. It has a very small budget of under \$185,000/year and is one of the best "bargains" in State government. It has the authority to require state agencies to provide plans that may have environmental impacts, but CEQ almost never utilizes this authority because CEQ generally works well with other state agencies.

CEQ's independence is what allows it to provide fair, balanced, and unfiltered recommendations to both the Administration and the General Assembly. CEQ's status as a valued watchdog for Connecticut's environment would quickly come into question if that independence were not honored.

The new structure as proposed within OLM might set up some unanticipated conflicts in the future. For example, the Chair and majority of the membership is appointed by the Governor, but the funding and staffing is provided by the Office of Legislative Management. It is not too hard to picture what problems might ensue if the Governor and leadership of the General Assembly were of different parties.

Please oppose this bill, leave CEQ in its current independent status, and work outside this committee to restore CEQ's funding and staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.